



The Music Parents' Guide

A Survival Kit for the New Music Parent

A Few Truths Parents Must Understand When Their Child Begins Playing a Musical Instrument

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It's the beginning of another school year, and hundreds of thousands of school children around the country have chosen which instrument they want to play and have taken it home for the first time. It's exciting, to say the least, and possibly the beginning of a life-long journey towards a love of music, learning new things, and molding a growth mindset.

That said, learning an instrument requires skills and traits that children may not have experienced yet — and that parents haven't thought (or known how) to teach. That's the beauty of instrumental music instruction, especially as part of school curricula. However, it's important that parents are prepared for that moment when their child plays their first notes ... and they don't sound all that great.

Here are 3 things parents need to be prepared to understand about their child learning a musical instrument:

There will not be as much immediate gratification as your child is used to...and that's okay. Our children live in an immediate gratification world.

Everything is at their fingertips — they press a button and something happens immediately. Although we all have chosen immediate gratification over delayed gratification (and vice versa) at some point our lives, our younger generation is not presented these choices often enough. If our children pick up an instrument for the first time and can't make a sound, they are liable to stigmatize themselves as “non-talented” or incapable of becoming successful at music — and want to quit immediately.

But that's not the truth.

I believe that intelligence is not the primary predictor of success. It is the ability to persevere in hardship, persist and learn after failure, and have a resilient spirit in the face of obstacles. If we can help our children stay focused on creating beautiful sounds on a musical instrument (even when that goal is farther away than they would like it to be), they will develop *grit* that will serve them well throughout their life.

It's crucial that we help our children understand the concept of delayed gratification, and musical instrument instruction is perfect for this. Some musical concepts require weeks of practice before children feel that incredible satisfaction from a successful performance. In a world filled with streaming Internet and fast food, learning an instrument helps "slow life down" a bit — and that's something that parents should not take for granted.

Practicing will become difficult if it is not part of a daily routine. If children leave school understanding the importance of having daily routines and how good habits are formed, teachers and parents will have done a great job. Music practice is something that must be incorporated into a daily routine along with homework and brushing teeth. Experts say it takes approximately 21 days to create a habit (as long as it happens for 21 days straight), so it's important for a practice routine to be incorporated into a child's day immediately upon receiving their instrument. Creating this routine is one of the reasons why the [first two months of being a music parent](#) are so important. Start with 5 minutes of playing a day and see where it takes your child.

Your child is talented, and *all* children are capable of becoming musically competent. Plenty of studies have been done to disprove the theory of inherited talents and innate gifts. Parents *can* impact their family's "gene pool" and [change their family tree](#) if they so choose. There is no evidence that exists to prove that musical talent is inherent, but it is also true that everyone doesn't always have the resources and tools to become great musicians. If music is offered in school curricula, and parents [help their child practice at home](#) in small ways, *all* children can have a true opportunity to realize their talents — both musical and other. It's unfortunate that studies in neuroscience were not as advanced when we were kids — too many current day parents thought they weren't "talented" when, in fact, they just needed more time with their craft and some minimal support.

Understanding these truths should be liberating for parents *and* their children, and take some stress off the first few weeks of learning a musical instrument. To become skilled at a musical instrument — and to become great at *anything* — one needs to struggle a little, so allow your child to do just that. They need to sound bad before they sound good; they need to work on things *just beyond* what they are capable of in order to get better and smarter, and that means they need to delay gratification a bit and embrace struggle in order to grow as musicians and as human beings.

There will be some hard days, but there will be far more amazing moments and beautiful music making down the road after what may seem like some initial frustration. Parents should treasure the fact that music is offered through school, and that it offers their children ways of learning that no other subject can.

Parents who make a long-term commitment to music instruction gives children the tools to succeed in music — and therefore in life — and is one of the greatest gifts they can give this year.